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## Breton's *Nadja*: A Spiritual Ethnography

### Abstract

A comparison of Breton's *Nadja* (1928, revised 1962) with Carlos Castaneda's recent ethnographic studies provides numerous insights into the structure of Breton's work. The narrative technique of *Nadja* combines documentary and literary modes, reflecting the double focus of the narrator's personal quest for self-knowledge and quasi-scientific quest for knowledge of external surrealistic phenomena. *Nadja* offers Breton a personal relationship capable of integrating, through an essentially cultural process, the subjective and objective levels of his investigation, but his fear of madness causes him to reject this personal involvement. He thereby rejects the only source of the integrative understanding he seeks, turning instead to the "convulsive beauty" of an irresolvable double focus on self and other.

### Keywords

Breton, Carlos Castaneda, *Nadja*, narrative technique, ethnographic studies, ethnological expedition, external surrealistic phenomena

## BRETON'S *NADJA*: A SPIRITUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

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One of the most often posed and least successfully resolved issues in the critical discussion of Breton's *Nadja*<sup>1</sup> is that of the genre to which the work belongs. *Nadja*'s ability to defy such classification has not only forced critics to undertake a re-evaluation of genre theory, but has also encouraged recourse to comparison with other works of similarly marginal generic status, or with works having to do with ostensibly non-literary disciplines. An example of such a comparison is Michel Beaujour's analysis, largely genre-oriented, which ends with a comparison of *Nadja* to *L'Afrique fantôme (Phantom Africa)*, Michel Leiris' journal of an anthropological expedition to the African continent.<sup>2</sup> Beaujour describes *Nadja* as "the story of an ethnological expedition into the interior of a singularly disquieting city, a haunted Paris,"<sup>3</sup> the intention of which is to indicate that "the marvelous is immediately at hand in the most common places."<sup>4</sup> The discussion attempts no sustained structural comparison between the two works, but serves merely to associate *Nadja* with the *idea* of an ethnological expedition.

An anthropological study published two years after Beaujour's article, however, offers possibilities for carrying this insight much further towards an understanding of *Nadja*'s mode of existence. *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, by Carlos Castaneda, records the unexpected results of Castaneda's intended study of psychotropic plants and their use by the Indians of the American Southwest. During the course of the study, the author's informant, a Yaqui Indian named don Juan, draws him into an "apprenticeship," the goal of which is to become a "sorcerer" and a "man of knowledge." Castaneda records a number of drug experiences associated with his apprenticeship over a four-year

period, as well as discussions with don Juan as to the significance of those experiences. He finally terminates his apprenticeship out of fear for his continued ability to distinguish reality from hallucination, and ends the book with an extended and academic "structural analysis" of don Juan's "belief system" as well as of his pedagogy for teaching that system. This book is followed by a second, *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan*, which describes the resumption of the apprenticeship and essentially resembles *The Teachings*, and a third, *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*, which re-examines the original series of meetings with don Juan, shifting the emphasis from the use of psychotropic plants to don Juan's differing perception of the physical world.<sup>5</sup>

The comparison of Castaneda's work to *Nadja* is suggested not only by certain intellectual similarities between the protagonists (especially in their attitudes toward "chance"), but also by the similarity of the controversies regarding genre and discipline which surround the two works. There is both internal and external evidence to indicate that *Don Juan* may be at least in part fiction, evidence which, though as yet inconclusive, is eagerly seized upon by those who are too disturbed by the work's content to want to accept it as anthropology in the strict sense of the word. My intention is not, however, to interpret *Don Juan* as literature, nor is it to portray Castaneda as a surrealist. *Don Juan* has been chosen for comparison to *Nadja*, rather, because many of the features which the two works have in common (the search for self-understanding, the consideration of non-rational modes of perception, the close relationship between the narrator and an individual who seems to live a different order of reality) are of such a nature as to suggest the possibility of a deeper structural resemblance. If such a resemblance exists, it is possible that examination of the relatively simple and open structure of *Don Juan* might lead to a better understanding of the far more complex and hidden structure upon which *Nadja* is built. My assumption here is that excessive attention to generic classification will (as is so often the case) prove to be of little ultimate value in dealing with *Nadja*, and may, in fact, obscure the text and mislead the reader. On the other hand, I believe that useful and positive results may be achieved through a rigorously *literary* (rather than documentary) treatment



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of *Nadja* (that is, one which considers that the text constitutes its own privileged context and that it communicates meaning out of this context alone).

It is of paramount importance to Castaneda, as a social scientist, that he persuade the reader from the outset of the reliability of his factual observation. In the introduction to *The Teachings*, he is scrupulous in reporting any factors which may have a bearing on the objectivity of his account:

As I have arranged my notes to fit the continuity of the narrative, they are not always in proper chronological sequence. I never wrote my description of a state of nonordinary reality [an experience with hallucinogenic plants] until several days after I had experienced it, waiting until I was able to treat it calmly and objectively. My conversations with don Juan, however were taken down as they occurred....

My field notes disclose the subjective version of what I perceived while undergoing the experience.... I added incidental details in an attempt to recapture the total setting of each state of nonordinary reality. (pp. 13-14)

Breton too would convince us of the objectivity of his account of his personal experiences. His goal, however, is the "objectivity" of "objective chance," that is, a narrative flow free of rational interference from the author: "I shall limit myself here to recalling without effort certain things which, apart from any exertions on my part, have occasionally happened to me...; I shall discuss these things without pre-established order, and according to the mood of the moment which lets whatever survives survive" (p. 23). Thus we have Breton's explicit assurance that neither the original "data" nor their mode of presentation have been influenced by the author's interest in achieving a particular result.

Such a narrative approach would seem to suggest a stream of free association, resulting in a text very different from Castaneda's meticulously constructed report. The shared interest in objectivity in the two works, however, is expressed at least in part through the same narrative device: the journal. The essentially episodic nature which we find in the journal form as used by Breton is characteristic also of the large number of anecdotes to be found in *Nadja*, both those of a personal nature (in general,

pages 24 to 60) and the non-personal anecdotes concerning, for example, Victor Hugo, the plot of *Les Détraquées*, and M. Delouit. This episodic structure has the effect of packaging experience and presenting it in circumscribed units of meaning, trimmed of material incidental to or inconsistent with the information or impression being communicated. Clearly there is a process of selection going on in the narration, suggesting a desire not so much to mystify as to persuade, to provide evidence upon which to base subsequent conclusions. Breton's claim to objectivity and his method of organization, therefore, both contribute to an impression of quasi-scientific discourse, which is, of course, strengthened by the inclusion of the photographs, and is further reflected in the preface to the 1962 edition: "the tone adopted for the narration is modeled upon that of medical observation, . . . which tends to retain the imprint of all that examination and interrogation are capable of delivering, without bothering itself in the least as to stylistic affectations." <sup>6</sup>

The phenomena accorded such a carefully objective treatment by Castaneda in his journal (psychotropic plants, Indian legends) are perceived at the outset as mutually discontinuous objects and occurrences except insofar as they share in the single, overall continuity of rationally perceived reality. Castaneda goes into the desert, notebook in hand, to observe a discrete object or place or event, and to interpret the data which he has collected concerning each of these separate phenomena according to his single, scientific reality construct. It is this method of observation, the only one available to him as a traditional Western social scientist, which dictates the episodic structure used in *Don Juan*.

In *Nadja*, the same basic relationship between narrative structure and mode of observation holds true. Breton is interested in certain specific types of phenomena which he seeks, collects, and records as discrete and discontinuous data. (I am speaking here and throughout, of course, not of the historical Breton, but of the first-person narrator and central character of *Nadja*. Indeed, a major implication of my argument is the danger involved in confusing the two — in automatically assuming that the actions and statements of the character are consistent with the theories of the author.) He describes going to the Saint-Ouen flea market, for example, "searching for objects that can be found nowhere else:

old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse — at least in the sense I give to the word and which I prefer" (p. 52). Though he lives surrounded by objects immediately at hand, objects placed there "by chance," these objects are devoid of interest for him. Rather he is after particular kinds of objects with particular characteristics, which he can find only through intentional search and selection. Certain places hold similar value for him, such as the *boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle*: "I don't know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure clue: namely that it (?) will happen here" (p. 32). Breton denies a "specific purpose" and yet clearly expects to find something here which cannot be found elsewhere. The same process of search and selection takes place in the observing and recording of events:

I intend to mention, in the margin of the narrative I have yet to relate, only the most decisive episodes of my life as *I can conceive it apart from its organic plan*, and only insofar as it . . . [admits] me to an almost forbidden world of sudden parallels, petrifying coincidences. . . . I am concerned with . . . facts which may belong to the order of pure observation, but which on each occasion present all the appearances of a signal, without our being able to say precisely which signal, and of what; facts which when I am alone permit me to enjoy unlikely complicities, which convince me of my error in occasionally presuming I stand at the helm alone. (pp. 19-20 — The italics, here and in all other quotations, are those of the author quoted.)

Breton earlier insists that, with respect to his writing, he will continue to live in a "glass house" (p. 18), meaning that the author will always remain visible within his book. In the passage just cited, however, Breton serves notice that the glass house will only be illuminated at certain brief moments, carefully selected for their special significance apart from the "organic plan" of his life. These moments are chosen by Breton because they suggest the existence of some larger controlling or influencing force, insusceptible of more direct description. They are the anecdotes which precede the *Nadja* journal itself, a journal which continues in the same pattern, recounting not the continuous succession of minor human details which are part of any developing personal relation-

ship, but rather a series of separate incidents focusing on Nadja's actions and statements as faithfully recorded by Breton in his role as intentional and systematic observer. Breton, no less than Castaneda, is on an expedition of purposeful exploration. His observations are to be objective, but with an objectivity which, as Castaneda's, is shaped by his perceptual system. The region in which his study is to be conducted has no clear geographical definition, such as the New Mexico desert of Castaneda's work, but is identified simply as "an almost forbidden world" (p. 19), a spiritual world in the sense that it is free of rational constraints and attuned to rationally imperceptible forces. He also shares Castaneda's basically ethnographic orientation. He focuses his attention on a culture apart, that is, on people (especially Nadja) whose practices, life styles, or modes of thought reflect some special involvement in the phenomena in which he is interested. It is in this sense that we may think of *Nadja* as a spiritual ethnography.

Such an interpretation could not long stand, of course, were it totally dependent on the objective, "scientific" character of Breton's text, for his narrative presents another, quite different aspect from the one described thus far. Beaujour, in his discussion of Breton's narrative technique in the personal anecdotes, focuses first on some of the same "non-literary" aspects which I have tried to demonstrate. As he correctly points out, however, "it remains to be seen whether the surprise and the coincidence [which characterize the events reported by Breton] belong to the order of facts, from which Breton claims never to stray, or to the nature of the narrative which reports them and which draws them toward fiction."<sup>7</sup> Beaujour's conclusion is that Breton's style "is rarely limited to . . . a scientific recounting,"<sup>8</sup> and there are many reasons to agree with this interpretation. The scientific tone is notably absent, for example, in the paragraph preceding Nadja's introduction: "Last of all, now, the tower of the Manoir d'Ango explodes and a snowfall of feathers from its doves dissolves on contact with the earth of the great courtyard once paved with scraps of tiles and now covered with real blood!" (p. 60). In a less obvious way, the book is scattered through with "literature," with manipulation of the reader's subjective response through formal devices, rather than through objective facts objectively reported. An example is

Breton's recounting of the plot of *Les Détraquées*. Preceding his remarks with an insistence on the essentially visual nature of the play, he states his descriptive intention in extremely modest terms: "With these reservations, I do not consider it unprofitable in other respects to relate its plot" (p. 40). The simple, objective tone in which he begins is appropriate to this intention: "The curtain rises on the office of the principal of a girls' school" (p. 40). But by the end of a long and increasingly emotional "plot summary," the tone has shifted to match the suspense and foreboding of the play itself: "We consider the doctor. The inspector. The servants. Solange. The principal. . . . The latter, looking for a cordial, goes to the first-aid cabinet, opens it. The child's bloody corpse appears, head downward, and falls onto the floor. The scream, the unforgettable scream" (p. 49 — The ellipsis is Breton's.). Beaujour characterizes much of Breton's narrative style as "incantation," built upon devices such as "the regular employment of these confusing and slippery adverbs: *always*, *never*, and *precisely*," or "bursts of rhetorical questions which open out onto territories where science hesitates to set its foot."<sup>9</sup>

Breton's mixture of documentary and literary styles is therefore not merely a question of alternation or juxtaposition, but also of an interjection of the one style into a situation where we have been led to expect the other, thus calling into question the value of the entire narrative as objective observation. As several critics have pointed out, the photographs, supposedly an objective record of what has taken place, only add to this confusion. None gives us any information which is particularly useful in understanding the author's argument, and many actually raise new questions. To take only one of many examples, Breton illustrates photographically (in the 1962 revision) the expression "fern-colored eyes."<sup>10</sup> But that expression, as used in the text, refers specifically to *Nadja's* eyes (p. 111). Does this mean that we are to take the eyes in the photograph to be *Nadja's* eyes, even though no other pictures of *Nadja* are included, and in the absence of any concrete physical description of *Nadja* in the text? Breton provides no clue.

Another perspective on Breton's narrative technique is provided in a study by Claude Martin,<sup>11</sup> who focuses his attention on the 1962 revision of *Nadja* and on what the nature of that revision can show us about Breton's actual conception of the work. Martin



identifies some three hundred corrections, not counting changes in punctuation. He finds none of these changes, however, to have any influence on structure or meaning. Rather they seem to bear out Breton's simple claim of "a certain concern for the best expression" ("quelque égard au mieux-dire" — pp. 6-7 of the 1962 preface). For Martin, this admission proves that "we are dealing with a *writer* attached to his art, with an artisan who takes seriously 'a job well done' and, finally, who respects certain laws of literary expression."<sup>12</sup>

Does all of this simply go to prove then that, from whatever narrative perspective we begin to examine the work, the Breton of *Nadja* is finally just another *littérateur*? Such a conclusion, I believe, fails to take into account a point which is essential to an understanding of the work. This point is simply the double, and *unresolved*, focus of *Nadja*. Breton himself labels the two narrative aspects of that focus in his preface: "Subjectivity and objectivity launch against one another, over the course of a human life, a series of assaults, from which most often the first quickly emerges in rather sad shape."<sup>13</sup> One way of explaining this seemingly irreparable split between subjectivity and objectivity, and the part it plays structurally in *Nadja*, is to return to our comparison of *Nadja* and *Don Juan*.

In the introduction to *The Teachings of Don Juan*, Castaneda speaks of the changes which his original investigation of medicinal plants underwent in the early weeks of his relationship with don Juan: "On each visit I tried to lead him to discuss peyote, but without success. We became, nonetheless, very good friends, and my scientific investigation was forgotten or was at least redirected into channels that were worlds apart from my original intention" (p. 2). These new channels are, for the moment, in conflict with one another, since, in his own mind, Castaneda is engaged in scientific research, while, in the view of don Juan, he is undergoing his apprenticeship to become a sorcerer. Later in the book, he describes don Juan's offer of "knowledge": "he said learning was the only thing involved, learning in the sense of what I had experienced in the two sessions with him" (p. 42). But learning by personal experience does not coincide with Castaneda's view of objective, scientific inquiry: "I told him that my bent of character was to talk about acts others performed. I wanted to hear his

views and opinions about everything. . . . To me, *that* would be learning" (p. 42). Gradually it becomes clear to him that in these two kinds of learning are involved not simply his own project and that of don Juan, but two different quests, both having relevance to himself. The information he is gathering has to do not only with his goal of learning about the world, but with his own personal life as well, to the point where he begins frequently to interpret the one as an allegory of the other. In *Journey to Ixtlan*, Castaneda gives us don Juan's summation of the real point of his learning: "that his [don Juan's] world of precise acts and feelings and decisions was infinitely more effective than the blundering idiocy I called 'my life' " (p. 81). Castaneda is forced by the weight of experience to admit the truth of don Juan's assertion, and from this point on the inward focus of his investigation — the exploration of his own self-awareness, ambitions, resources — is co-equal to the outward focus — the nature of the world and of external phenomena, whether scientifically or spiritually perceived. Castaneda is clearly on two expeditions, two voyages of active discovery at once — one into the desert to encounter a Yaqui Indian and his exotic beliefs and practices, and one into his own mind to encounter himself, suddenly a rather exotic being in his own right.

It is precisely such a quest for knowledge, split into investigations of the inner self and of the world of external phenomena, which characterizes *Nadja*. There is no need, of course, to prove an interest in self-exploration on the part of the narrator in a work which opens with the question "Who am I?" ("Qui suis-je?"). Roger Shattuck, in fact, considers such an interest to be the essence of the whole book.<sup>14</sup> According to Shattuck, this opening sentence involves a pun on the verb *suis* (conjugated either from *être*, "to be," or from *suivre*, "to follow"), setting the tone for what is to become a complex self-pursuit, "an elaborate commentary on Rimbaud's lapidary outburst: 'Car JE est un autre' ['For I is another']".<sup>15</sup> Examining the remainder of the "who am I?" passage from this perspective, we find Breton describing himself as a "phantom" and making reference to "what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who* I am," to "what I regard as the objective, more or less deliberate manifestations of my existence," to "a completed image of my mind," to his life as "an image" (pp. 11-12). Each of these self-descriptions has the effect of separating to a

certain extent Breton the object of observation from Breton the observer. Anna Balakian has noted this separation in a number of Breton's literary works of the same period: "There are two 'I' 's in the works: the 'I' who is the object of the adventures and the 'I' who explains the relative significances of the experience to which he has been subjected."<sup>16</sup> The extremely personal goal of his search is reduced to a simple formula for an immensely difficult undertaking: "I strive, in relation to other men, to discover the nature, if not the necessity, of my difference from them" (p. 13). Self-knowledge, conceived in these terms, necessarily implies knowledge of one's external context, and Breton has already expressed an understanding of this relationship: "what I regard as the objective, more or less deliberate manifestations of my existence are merely the premises, within the limits of this existence, of an activity whose true extent is quite unknown to me" (p. 12). He recognizes that, as the inquiry proceeds, the answers to his questions about himself and his questions about the world around him may very well turn out to be the same answers.

Breton, then, is on essentially the same double quest as Castaneda, and it is this doubling of focus which accounts for the confusion in narrative modes in *Nadja* which we noted earlier. Breton's description of his own conception of the literary mode shows its relevance to his double focus. From his opening passage, he launches, with the barest of transitions, into a discussion of the goals of literary criticism and of the value of literary works. His primary interest, he says, lies in that area of a work "where the author's personality ... expresses itself quite freely" (p. 13). Such "generally extra-literary preoccupations" (p. 14) are the essence of literature for Breton and are, in fact, precisely the preoccupations motivating his own project of self-exploration: "As far as I am concerned, a mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects, these two kinds of arrangement controlling between them all forms of sensibility" (p. 16). The mind in question is ultimately, of course, his own, and since its study conforms to the true goals of literature it is entirely appropriate that his account should take advantage not only of an objective, documentary mode of narration (with regard to the "arrangements of objects"), but of the literary prerogatives of subjectivity and formal manip-



ulation as well. In this context, Breton's image of the glass house seems particularly apt as a representation of his narrative undertaking. The medium of narration is the glass itself, sustaining at once a gaze outward toward the phenomena of the external world and inward toward the unconcealed narrator, and on whose very surface "*who I am* will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond" (p. 18). What is vital is that "*who I am*" should be visible from *within* as well as from without.

The method and purpose of the narrative, then, are highly complex and exert an important influence on the outcome of the work. Another significant aspect to be considered is the relationship between the two principal characters, Breton and Nadja.

Their first meeting creates a strong impression of contrast. Breton first gives us a brief glimpse of himself performing rather routine and predictable acts associated with his professional interests: stopping before the bookstore window of *L'Humanité*, purchasing the latest work by Trotsky. He seems at this point to find his existence somewhat ordinary and not altogether satisfying, describing the time of day as "toward the end of one of those idle, gloomy afternoons I know so well how to spend" (p. 63). The people in the street around him are even more steeped in their routines and their petty pursuits than he is: "No, it was not yet these who would be ready to create the Revolution" (p. 64). But his first sight of Nadja, coming down the street toward him, suggests a creature whose existence has little enough in common with his own, and still less with that of the crowds around him: "She carried her head high, unlike everyone else on the sidewalk. And she looked so delicate she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked. A faint smile may have been wandering across her face. She was curiously made up . . ." (p. 64).

Here their meeting begins to resemble the first meeting between Castaneda and don Juan. Stepping up to don Juan for the first time to request information about plants, Castaneda finds in the Indian's eyes a look that strikes through to something very sensitive and very personal in himself: "Don Juan's look . . . numbed me to the point that I could not think coherently. I became thoroughly intrigued with that stupendous look and decided to search for him" (*Journey to Ixtlan*, pp. 18-19). Similarly, it is through Nadja's eyes that the first significant contact between Breton

and Nadja takes place: "I had never seen such eyes. . . . She smiled, but quite mysteriously and somehow *knowingly* [*"comme en connaissance de cause"* — p. 72], though I had no reason to think so. . . . What was so extraordinary about what was happening in those eyes? What was it they reflected — some obscure distress and at the same time some luminous pride?" (pp. 64-5). From this point, the two relationships develop along comparable lines marked by certain significant differences, and an exploration of these differences may provide some clues as to why Breton is led into the spiritual crisis precipitated by his relationship with Nadja, and why he deals with that crisis as he does.

Castaneda comes to don Juan, as we have seen, for information. Don Juan, on the other hand, feels duty-bound to provide an initiation into "knowledge" for Castaneda, who, he believes, has been designated for such knowledge by Mescalito, the spirit associated with peyote. Thus each has a pragmatic reason for maintaining the relationship. The "stupendous look" which first cements that relationship, however, has nothing directly to do with these reasons. Rather it is a flash of closeness and understanding which passes between the two men, and is the beginning of what is quite simply a deep and lasting *friendship*. It is this personal attraction which is largely responsible for Castaneda's eventual acceptance of the apprenticeship and of its attendant difficulties and frustrations. An important aspect of that apprenticeship, for example, involves what don Juan calls "erasing personal history" (refusing to be what the factual details of one's life would tend to make of one in the minds of others). Castaneda finds this "an appealing concept," but one carrying within it "a sense of loneliness" which he finds "threatening and distasteful" (*Journey to Ixtlan*, p. 31). He makes clear to the reader that he is finally able to accept and to put into practice such concepts almost entirely as a result of the support and encouragement provided by don Juan, in his role as a personal friend.

Breton, for his part, enters without hesitation into a relationship with Nadja primarily because his observations and experiences have prepared him to recognize her relevance to his quest. This special relevance is what is signaled to him by the look in her eyes. It is unclear, however, whether in that look anything of importance passes between them in the opposite direction — wheth-

er Nadja's gaze merely speaks of its source or actually implies some special understanding of its object, as does don Juan's. If any such understanding or response on Nadja's part is present, Breton seems not to perceive it. Nadja's "connaissance de cause" refers apparently to *self*-knowledge, rather than foreknowledge of Breton, and the "distress" and the "pride" mirrored in her eyes originate within her. There is, in fact, only the barest hint that she might have any special interest in him at all, a hint contained in Breton's puzzlement at the quickness with which Nadja informs him of her financial status: "the riddle set by the beginning of a confession which, without asking me anything further, with a confidence which could (or which could not?) be misplaced, she made me" (65). As the journal continues, Breton seems for a time to preserve fairly strictly a pragmatic object/observer relationship between Nadja and himself. He records long soliloquies of Nadja's, and occasional physical details of their surroundings, but only rarely does he give vent to his own impulses or personal responses with more than a short sentence. The only major exception in the first entry is his long discourse to Nadja on the unimportance of work — and even that is simply a re-play of an earlier fulmination against "the moral value of work" (p. 59), and therefore of interest not for what it tells us of Breton, but for the curious response which it occasions on the part of Nadja.

Thus the structure of their relationship at this point is both similar to and different from that enjoyed by Castaneda and don Juan. It is similar in its episodic nature — we see nothing of their lives apart from their time together. It is similar too in that it involves an erasing of "personal history," though one which Breton accepts easily. He gives Nadja some of his books to read but he never actually sits down to tell her about himself. Nadja recounts to Breton a number of stories concerning her past, but in light of her deliberate falsification of her relationship to her mother and her former lovers, of her penchant for taking on mythical or historical personalities (Melusine, Mme. de Chevreuse, a member of Marie Antoinette's cortege), and of her avowed practice of living according to the stories she tells herself, Breton would be foolish indeed to take her "personal history" as factual. Each can represent to the other no more than the experience of the present moment. Both of these aspects of their relationship tend to further

Breton's pragmatic ends. Their relationship differs from that of Castaneda and don Juan, however, in that at the outset Nadja has no goals of her own in maintaining the relationship, or else keeps those goals hidden, and in that the deep human attachment which exists between Castaneda and don Juan is totally missing from their relations at this point.

As they are about to end their third meeting, however, the whole tenor of Nadja's participation in the relationship is transformed radically. She stares at Breton for a long time in the taxi as he accompanies her home:

She seems to be suffering from a certain inner conflict, but suddenly she surrenders, closes her eyes for good, offers me her lips. . . . [The ellipsis is Breton's, leading us to assume that the offer is accepted.] Now she tells me of my power over her, of my faculty for making her think and do whatever I desire, perhaps more than I think I desire. Because of this, she begs me to do nothing against her. She feels she has never had any secrets from me, long before knowing me. (p. 79)

This notion of a special bond which unites them continues to occupy Nadja. She stops to press her own hand against a hand in an advertisement which she associates with Breton. She assures him that he will write a novel about her (p. 100). She insists that everyone is impressed by the sight of them together (p. 106). Even the sentences which she writes or recites from time to time in the manner of automatic poetry echo this profound attachment: " 'You are my master. I am only an atom respiring at the corner of your lips or expiring' " (p. 116).

Breton, for his part, begins to respond to these suggestions of Nadja's as to the special depth of their relationship. As we have seen, he returns her first kiss, and at least two more kisses are mentioned in the days that follow. He becomes convinced that she is somehow involved in earlier events of his life as recounted in his books. He becomes protective when she is bothered by a drunk. He accompanies her in their wild ramblings after they leave the *place Dauphine*, feeling her complete dependence on him: "She is very abandoned in her behavior, very sure of me" (p. 84). In the next journal entry (October 7), Breton begins, for the first time since the Nadja encounter, to speak of his time apart from her

and of his own personal feelings. He grapples with a sudden confusion as to the nature of his feelings regarding Nadja, and calls into question the legitimacy of his original cold, observer/object relationship with her: "I am annoyed [with myself — "Je suis mécontent de moi" — p. 102]. I suppose I observe her too much, but how can I help it? How does she regard me, how does she judge me? It is unforgivable of me to go on seeing her if I do not love her. Don't I love her? When I am near her I am nearer things which are near her. In her condition, she is certainly going to need me, one way or another, and suddenly" (p. 90). Though he is becoming increasingly uncomfortable at the prospect of her dependence on him, he finally recognizes his own dependence on her for the success of his quest for knowledge: "And if I never see her again? I wouldn't *know* any more. And I should therefore have deserved not to know any more. And it would never happen again" (p. 90). Whatever the nature of his interest in her, Breton is forced finally to admit that Nadja is correct about their impressiveness as a couple: "As she points out, it is true that everyone — even people in a great hurry — is turning around to look at us; it isn't Nadja they're looking at, but *us*" (p. 106). At the same time that Nadja is placing herself totally at his mercy and disposition, Breton is attempting to define their complicated relationship and to restrict it to acceptable limits. These limits have nothing to do with personal attachment, but rather with pragmatic goals and moral imperatives. Nevertheless, he is clearly aware that something in their relationship is militating against these limits, carrying it beyond his control.

Another factor that is changing concurrently with Breton's personal feelings about Nadja is his view of her sanity. Fleeing the *place Dauphine* with Nadja, Breton discovers that whatever is driving her has nothing to do with any particular place. As they walk aimlessly about the city, Nadja is seized by one strange compulsion after another. Breton's anxiety is no longer centered on the experiences which they are undergoing, but on Nadja herself: "I am concerned. . . . Nadja is still upset" (p. 85). The restrained term "upset" is soon followed by one more explicit, as Nadja tries to read his thoughts: "You think I'm very sick, don't you? I'm not sick" (p. 86). (The context clearly indicates that the word "sick" refers to mental illness.) But whether her condition is one of



madness or something far more mysterious, Breton is totally shut out of her visions. He is capable of observing phenomena in the material world around him, such as the fact that a window in a building shows a red light only a minute after Nadja's prediction of the event. But he is unable and unwilling to draw any conclusions from this event or to speculate on the mechanism by which Nadja was able to foresee it: "I am sorry, but I am unable to do anything about the fact that this may exceed the limits of credibility. Nevertheless, in dealing with such a subject, I should never forgive myself for taking sides: I confine myself to *granting* that this window, being black, has now become red, and that is all" (p. 83). And he is totally unable to penetrate those visions to which there is no corresponding material manifestation. He does not, in fact, even affirm that a vision, properly speaking, is taking place. He responds rather with attempts to drag Nadja physically back to reality (though she is in no ostensible danger), and when this fails he simply waits for the seizure to end, rather than showing any interest in the experience that she is undergoing: "It is in front of this window that we must wait, she knows that much. It is from here that everything can come. It is here that everything begins. She holds on to the railing with both hands so that I will not pull her away. She virtually stops answering my questions. For the sake of peace I wait until she is ready to continue of her own free will" (pp. 84-5). Finally, of course, Breton receives news of Nadja's committal to a mental hospital: "I was told, several months ago, that Nadja was mad" (p. 136). The statement could not show less passion or surprise. Though he quarrels with the method of treatment, he accepts completely the diagnosis.

This involvement of the narrator in inexplicable physical manifestations and experiences of a visionary or hallucinatory nature is characteristic of *Don Juan* as well. In this case, however, the experiences are direct. There are scattered descriptions of don Juan's accounts of "*seeing*," but the more elaborate visionary experiences are all undergone by Castaneda himself. While he may try to seek rational explanations for seemingly irrational events, or to label them mere hallucinations brought on by drugs, he can never deny that *something* has happened at *some* level of reality, because he has the incontrovertible evidence of his own experience. And he is prevented from attributing his experience to

temporary insanity by the support and corroboration which he receives from don Juan. It is his friendship and relationship of trust with don Juan which allow him to accept this "special consensus" as to the content of reality. Castaneda's questions, therefore, have to do not with *whether* the phenomena of "nonordinary reality" exist, but with *how*. His attention remains focused directly on the issues central to his quest for knowledge. Breton, lacking direct personal experience of the phenomena connected with Nadja, and lacking as well the necessary human confidence in her, calls into question the very existence of the visionary phenomena she experiences and purposely directs his attention *away from* evidence which, if corroborated in some manner, would be clearly relevant to his investigation.

This contradictory behavior on Breton's part is the result of fear. The element of fear is mentioned at least once long before the Nadja story begins, in the anecdote concerning the images on the facades of the *bois-charbons* shops (pp. 27-8). He does not elaborate on the nature or basis of this fear, but it does serve to prepare the reader for the anxiety-producing potential of Breton's encounters with the inexplicable, the surreal, the marvelous. This potential is again realized in the eerie fulfillment of Nadja's prediction concerning the lighted window in the *place Dauphine*: "I confess that this place frightens me, as it is beginning to frighten Nadja too [or, "I confess that at this point I'm becoming frightened, as is Nadja" — "J'avoue qu'ici la peur me prend, comme aussi elle commence à prendre Nadja" — p. 95]" (pp. 83-4). Nadja's fear at this point actually arises from a subsequent vision whose content is genuinely menacing, but Breton's fear is occasioned purely by the preceding display of Nadja's strange powers. More and more, as we have seen, Breton's growing anxiety becomes focused on Nadja and the possibility of her insanity, of a form of insanity which seems to involve frightening visions and loss of control. Although Breton does not share in those visions, their obvious effect on Nadja seems quite unsettling to him. His violent headache, which he attributes to the previous evening spent with Nadja, introduces the notion of a threat to his own health arising from his involvement with her. Mme. Sacco, the seer, warns that Nadja represents a possible danger to one of Breton's friends. The final straw for Breton is his discovery that Nadja has actually been

physically attacked by one of her ever-changing entourage of strange characters (p. 113). Realizing that her characteristic behavior might at any time provoke a repetition of the incident, he makes the decision to leave her. Though he returns to her for a time, he recognizes that he does not wish to involve himself in the disaster which she is courting: "Perhaps . . . the disaster of which that day gave me a notion, had gradually separated me from her" (p. 114).

Breton himself comes to the realization that that which we have seen to be present in Castaneda's relationship with don Juan, namely a strong, personal, strictly human tie, separate from all practical ends, is precisely what is missing from his involvement with Nadja, that without this special tie any achievements with regard to his original quest must be swallowed up in the gulf which separates them: "But what was she offering me? It does not matter. Only love in the sense I understand it — . . . *certain* love that can only be *foolproof* [or, "as it can only be when equal to every trial" — "tel enfin qu'il ne peut être qu'à toute épreuve" — p. 157], might have permitted the fulfillment of a miracle" (pp. 135-6). And yet has she not offered him "love equal to every trial," and has he not resisted such a "miracle"? He himself seems to affirm that it is the bizarre unpredictability of Nadja's world that prevents his fully committing himself to her: "Everything that permits us to live another's life . . . no longer existed for me, had never existed: this was only too certain. It could scarcely be otherwise, considering the world which was Nadja's where everything so rapidly assumed the appearance of a rise, a fall" (p. 135). The next mention of Nadja is the report of her committal to a mental hospital, and his final analysis of the difference between them is that she lacks his "common sense" (p. 143 — The same French expression, "instinct de conservation," is earlier rendered more accurately as "instinct of self-preservation" — p. 20), the instinct which prevents merely bizarre behavior from crossing the line into what the rational world calls madness and thereby causing an open confrontation between the two orders of reality.

Fear of such confrontation has been associated by various critics with Breton's increasing distance and finally his separation from Nadja. According to Roger Cardinal, for example, "Breton cannot entirely subdue an irrational fear caused by certain man-



ifestations of the surreal—even when his conscious mind, intent on gathering documentation for his book, tells him he should delight in them. In the company of Nadja, one senses Breton's instinctive recoil from the possible contagion of madness."<sup>17</sup> This process cannot be fully understood, however, without taking into account the development of the *personal* relationship between Nadja and Breton. Shattuck, in fact, suggests an almost complete identification of Nadja's being with that of Breton: "In haunting Nadja, Breton was pursuing his own identity; his encounter with himself in her resembles a battle he wins and that leaves her only the disabled and plundered vestige of herself."<sup>18</sup> Although Shattuck does emphasize their personal involvement with one another, I believe that the question of who haunts whom is open to another interpretation. That is, Nadja, not Breton, is the one who senses and attempts to reinforce the close identification between them. Breton, however, caught up in his quest for the marvelous and its *beneficial* influence on human life, only sees in Nadja increasing evidence of its *pernicious* influence. She seems gradually to surrender control of her life to this power or influence. For Breton to join his life to hers with the totality in which they both believe would mean a similar loss of control on his part—a kind of control which early in the book he describes as vitally necessary in the face of "certain combinations of circumstances which greatly surpass our understanding and permit us to resume rational activity only if, in most cases, we call upon our very instinct of self-preservation" (p. 20). It is this ability to return to "rational activity" which would be compromised by his acceding to her offer of love. The destructive potential of such total involvement with Nadja is illustrated in a footnote near the end of the book, in which Breton describes Nadja's attempt to blind him in an embrace while pushing the car accelerator to the floor, and expresses his gratitude to her "for revealing to me, in such an overpowering way, what a common recognition of love would have committed us to at that moment. I feel less and less capable of resisting such a temptation *in every case*" (p. 153). Thus Nadja counters his double quest—that of the seeker of self-knowledge and that of the recorder of "surrealistic" phenomena in the world at large—with an invitation to strike through to a more complete and integrated involvement with the marvelous, an involvement as

fraught with danger as with reward. But his instinct of self-preservation, which links him once more with the (as he has described them) non-revolutionary mass of people in the street, blocks the temptation embodied in Nadja.<sup>19</sup>

Fear of madness is also an important factor for Castaneda in determining the course of his apprenticeship/research. In recording don Juan's explanation of "losing one's body," for example, he says, "I told him I did not want to argue or to ask stupid questions, but if I accepted the idea that it was possible to lose my body I would lose all my rationality" (*The Teachings*, p. 144). He responds similarly to the experience of smoking don Juan's mushroom mixture: "the only thing that occurred to me, over and over again, was that with the smoke one loses one's mind" (p. 145). He resists this fear through personal affirmation of "nonordinary" phenomena, made possible by the continuing personal support of don Juan. There is a point, however, at which he undergoes a state of "special nonordinary reality" — that is, one which resembles a drug experience in its seemingly hallucinatory quality, but which could not possibly be drug-induced. Frightened by the implications of this experience for his already battered confidence in his ability to distinguish between reality and non-reality, he withdraws from the apprenticeship. He is quite open about his reason for doing so: "I do believe that I have succumbed to the first enemy of a man of knowledge [fear, according to don Juan's schema]" (*The Teachings*, p. 198). He counters this fear, however, with a "structural analysis" of don Juan's teachings, which has the effect of driving apart the two goals of his study, goals which have been brought into near identity with one another only at the cost of much time and effort. The discussion, "an attempt to disclose the internal cohesion and the cogency of don Juan's teachings" (p. 201), is a complete break with the earlier narrative. It is filled with anthropological jargon and is totally detached from that sense of the personally problematic that is so characteristic of the earlier portion of the study. Rather don Juan's teachings become a "belief system," complete with a pedagogy, a complicated procedure by which don Juan cues, persuades, and manipulates his apprentice in order to inculcate a particular view of reality. Gone, seemingly, is all subjective response to the experience of the apprenticeship,

and with it disappears his painfully acquired change in perspective on himself.

Breton uses a similar device to distance himself from an experience which has become unendurable through fear. He takes advantage of the concreteness and irrevocability of *Nadja*'s committal to a mental institution to terminate his personal involvement with her, to go on to other matters as though he issues raised by that involvement were settled once and for all. He returns to the tone of scientific and philosophical discourse used in the early pages of the book, commenting on conditions in mental asylums, the questionable practices of certain psychiatrists, the role in society of various institutions of internment, in short, anything which will help to dislodge the issue of madness from that highly personal plane on which it has grown to such fearful proportions. It is hardly a speech to add to his stature as a Surrealist firebrand. There is no interest shown, for example, in madness as a possibly beneficial altered state of consciousness. Beginning with the morally incredible and ideologically inconsistent statement that for *Nadja* there can be no very great difference between the inside of a sanatorium and the outside (p. 136), Breton advances his argument in eight pages to only the most banal sort of conclusion regarding madness: "The well-known lack of frontiers between *non-madness* and madness does not induce me to accord a different value to the perceptions and ideas which are the result of one or the other" (p. 144). He even attempts to absolve himself of responsibility for not inquiring into *Nadja*'s subsequent fate: "My general contempt for psychiatry, its rituals and its works, is reason enough for my not yet having dared investigate what has become of *Nadja*" (p. 141). Such an apparently self-centered response can be understood only in the context of the enormous threat posed to Breton's "instinct of self-preservation" by his personal involvement with *Nadja* and with her uncontrolled, and seemingly uncontrollable, mode of existence.

It is easy, at this point in the work, to dismiss Breton's actions as inconsistent with the principles enunciated in the *Surrealist Manifesto* and other theoretical writings (which, of course, they are) and as therefore not to be taken seriously. Cardinal's study, for example, expresses disappointment that Breton has set such a poor example as a Surrealist, excusing him only on the grounds

that “we respond less to the hesitations of the reporter than to the manifestations of surrealist genius that in spite of himself he transmits.”<sup>20</sup> Balakian ignores entirely these “hesitations,” allowing her attention to be successfully diverted by the narrator to “Breton’s vindictive attack on psychiatry and asylums.”<sup>21</sup> It is well, therefore, to recall once more that, if we are to deal with *Nadja* as a work of literature, a clear distinction must be maintained between Breton the author and Breton the character/narrator. We might, in fact, on the strength of the analysis thus far, go even further and state that *Nadja* is not a “surrealist novel” so much as it is a novel about surrealism (I intentionally use the lower case for both terms). The author himself has not always proceeded as a strict surrealist, in terms either of substance or of technique, so there is no reason to assume that his characters should do so. If we read with an open mind, rather, it is evident that to a large extent what we are observing is a man whose life has, with few exceptions, allowed him to indulge freely in certain *intellectually* held notions of reality, but who has at last encountered a situation which challenges his capacity to conduct his personal life exclusively on the basis of those somewhat extravagant notions. Breton’s apparent about-face at this point in the narrative, in other words, is entirely consistent with the development thus far of his response to *Nadja* and to the clash of creative intellect and stark reality which is at the heart of their relationship.

As we have seen, Breton feels torn, right up to the end of the relationship, between the danger represented by *Nadja* and the rare opportunity of some higher understanding which she offers. He describes, in a long, lyrical passage, the heights which they have scaled together: “How does it happen that thrown together, once and for all, so far from the earth, in those brief intervals which our marvelous stupor grants us, we have been able to exchange a few incredibly concordant views above the smoking debris of old ideas and sempiternal life?” (p. 111). Such spiritual journeys clearly have nothing to do with Breton’s instinct of self-preservation, but rather must be undertaken “voluntarily remote from the last raft, at the cost of everything that comprises the false but virtually irresistible compensations of life” (p. 112). He even speculates that such a voyage might be conceived of as “the mind’s greatest adventure” (p. 112). But at this point Breton’s *élan* is spent and he

comes crashing back to earth, racked with doubts, needing assurances which no one can give him. "Who is the real Nadja," he wants to know, "this always inspired and inspiring creature who enjoyed being nowhere but in the streets, the only region of valid experience for her," or merely the victim of those who see in her only "the most wretched of women, and the least protected?" (pp. 112-3).

When Breton decides that continued involvement with Nadja represents an unacceptable risk, the rejection is total. Nowhere in the long reflection on Nadja's madness is there a hint of the "incredibly concordant views" which they had once exchanged. He receives occasional letters from her, but avoids taking them seriously as direct human communication: "Nor could Nadja's letters, which I read the same way I read all kinds of surrealist texts — with the same eye — show me anything alarming" (p. 144). These letters cause him no alarm precisely *because* he reads them as poetry — and as no more than poetry (much as Castaneda reads don Juan's lessons as a disembodied belief system). The passage ends soon after on an admittedly pathetic note, with Breton defending his admitted "sophisms" concerning the line between madness and sanity: "to call them into question as sophisms, it must be admitted that they have done more than anything else to make me hurl at myself or at anyone who comes to meet me, the forever pathetic cry of 'Who goes there? Is it you, Nadja? Is it true that the beyond, that everything beyond is here in this life? I can't hear you. Who goes there? Is it only me? Is it myself?'" (p. 144).<sup>22</sup> Breton is back where he began. His "structural analysis" of Nadja's patterns of thought and behavior, of the realm in which the search for self and the search for the world become the same search, has produced the harmless (because personally distancing) conclusion that, at bottom, Nadja's life-style is one of "madness," and therefore to be avoided. This does not mean, however, that he is satisfied. He has failed to answer either of his questions — and he knows that he has failed. His focus is again split. The "beyond" is again only an intuition. The instinctive identification of his search for the beyond with his search for his own spiritual center is more tentative than ever.

Both Breton and Castaneda have seemingly amputated a growing form of awareness which can no longer be tolerated. Matters



do not rest there for either of them, however, and a final comparison reveals significant differences in their responses to their respective experiences.

Castaneda returns to visit don Juan, and he does so for two reasons. One is, after all, his abiding personal attachment to the old Indian: "Not to see don Juan was indeed a great loss for me" (*A Separate Reality*, p. 35). The other is his desire to clear up a few points concerning his analysis of don Juan's "system." Obviously his rational analysis means nothing to don Juan, but, still hopeful of completing his study, he is again encouraged to resume his apprenticeship—which provides the substance of *A Separate Reality*. In this second book, the introductory promises to the reader show a good deal more humility than those of the first: "This work is . . . a reportage and should be read as a reportage. The system I recorded was incomprehensible to me, thus the pretense to anything other than reporting about it would be misleading and impertinent" (p. 25). By the end of the period of time reported on, however, he has reached an entirely new understanding of the "system" he had been attempting to codify, an understanding which occasions the third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*. This new understanding is that psychotropic plants and drug-induced hallucinations really have nothing to do with the essence of don Juan's teachings. Free of the distorting perspective which he had imposed on those teachings, Castaneda goes back over his original field notes and finds that all along they had contained the key to the single, coherent view of reality which would account for both his own individual existence and the world at large with its seemingly inconsistent phenomena. This key involves a voluntary lowering of the mentally and culturally imposed boundaries separating objectivity and subjectivity. He again terminates his apprenticeship, but only because it has finally run its natural course: "The termination of the apprenticeship meant that I had learned a new description of the world in a convincing and authentic manner and thus had become capable of eliciting a new perception of the world, which matched its new description. In other words, I had gained *membership*" (p. 14).

The specific content of this "new perception" is not important to the present study. What is important is the way in which Castaneda expresses the final outcome of his learning. That he should

speak of "membership" in a culturally-based belief system is appropriate to the ethnomethodological school of cultural anthropology within which he has been trained. But what is unusual is that the researcher himself should gain (and take seriously) membership in the perceptual system which he is studying. The question of whether such a development constitutes good anthropology will have to be left to those who are competent to answer it. We are nevertheless justified in viewing such a process of scientifically divesting oneself of one's own perceptual biases, then turning one's attention to the phenomena which link the members of an alien perceptual community, and finally *gaining membership* in that community, as modern ethnology carried to its logical extreme. To reduce this process to a simple pattern, then, Castaneda sets out on a quest which has both an outward (objective, phenomenological) and an inward (subjective, personal) focus. This double focus begins to resolve itself through the agency of an emotional attachment to another human being, encouraging Castaneda to take advantage of the full range of his subjective as well as objective perceptual resources. The continued convergence of his two quests for knowledge into a single quest leads him to fear for his continued ability to distinguish between subjective and objective perception, an ability which he associates with "sanity." Finally, through the uninterrupted support of don Juan (essentially his "community" in this matter), he is able to risk a fusion of his subjectivity and objectivity into a single perceptual mode. Rather than madness, he finds a new way of thinking and acting which is able to bridge the gap between self and world. Because of its dependence on the depth of his human relationship with don Juan, his membership in don Juan's perceptual community must be attributed ultimately to a *cultural* process rather than to one of scientific investigation.

Breton's experience is characterized by essentially the same structure as Castaneda's up to the point of the crisis of "sanity." Their divergence at this point is a result of the fact that Castaneda merely allows his relationship with don Juan to become dormant for a time, whereas Breton exorcizes Nadja completely from his life and attempts to go on about his original business unburdened of her disruptive influence. His quest for total integration of self and world, however, is not one which achieves success either

through a purely subjective approach or a purely objective one, or even through an effort in which these two approaches operate simultaneously but separately. As we have noted in Breton's own 1962 preface, subjectivity and objectivity do not work well in tandem. On the contrary, their relationship is one of incompatibility. His quest, however, for a time combines objective observation and subjective emotional response into a *cultural* endeavor. That is, he begins to venture into a depth relationship with Nadja, a relationship at whose center lie the concerns basic to his exploration. This relationship makes of her a potential human model of thought and behavior, an integration of self and world with the power to resolve his heretofore separate subjective and objective perceptions of those two aspects of existence. For Nadja, as Balakian puts it, "has established in her innocent way the continuum between the exterior world and the objectification of the subjective."<sup>23</sup> Breton's rejection of his human involvement with Nadja and the experience she offers, however — and of the principle of such an involvement within the context of his quest — dooms that quest to failure, to the permanent irresolvability of its double focus, to its isolation outside of the integrative power of lived human reality. (I do not, of course, mean to suggest here that *Nadja* is in any way a work of quasi-anthropology. The ethnological model, admittedly highly simplistic in terms of the discipline which is its source, is offered merely as a means of bringing out certain structural characteristics of *Nadja* as a work of literature.)

I have said that matters do not remain in this crisis stage for either Castaneda or Breton. We have seen the kind of ultimate resolution achieved by Castaneda. In the case of Breton, the failure I have indicated only grows in complexity with Breton's apparent reluctance simply to stop writing, to recognize that he is at an end. He rejects the continued pursuit of his project as having become inconsistent with its own goals: "What I might be tempted to undertake in the long run will all too certainly make me unworthy of life as I prefer it and as it offers itself: a life *out of the running* [or, "a *breath-taking* life" — "*de la vie à perdre haleine*" — p. 171]" (pp. 147-8). He goes on, however, to describe a subsequent relationship with another woman, apparently a totally satisfying relationship in human terms, though he avoids mentioning a single factual detail concerning that relationship. This mysterious woman,



addressed directly but never named, seems to be cherished precisely for her *non*-involvement in Breton's search for ultimate answers (pp. 156-58). And yet he protests that his faith in "the Marvel" continues unchanged: "the Marvel, in which, from the first page of this book to the last, my faith will certainly [or, "at least" — "du moins" — p. 173] not have changed" (p. 151). And he offers himself up once more to the same vague powers which he invoked at the beginning of the book: "May the great living and echoing unconsciousness which inspires my only conclusive acts in any sense I always believe in, dispose forever of all that is myself" (p. 155). In other words, he reaffirms the original inspiration of his undertaking, but seems to deny the undertaking itself. He rejects his scientific/literary search as basically meaningless talk obstructing meaningful participation, and he reserves human relationships (rejecting the expression "love equal to every trial") for their own special potential, rather than turning them toward the unknown.

The final bit of evidence offered us is the insertion of a news item discovered in Breton's morning paper. The story concerns a mysterious message received by a telegraph operator. The reception is unclear and, in spite of all efforts at mechanical precision, the origin of the message cannot be located. "A morning paper," Breton says, "will always be adequate to give me my news" (p. 160). Efforts to ascertain the location of the mysterious message beamed at us from the beyond are apparently doomed to frustration — and apparently Breton is now *satisfied* with this state of affairs.

It is only in this last context that the word "beauty" appears. The only conclusion to be drawn is that Breton's failure is at least in part a willful one, that in this perpetual juggling of self and other, this cultivation of the irresolvable, lies the only beauty which life has to offer: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all" (p. 160).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960). Reference to this work will be by parenthetical pagination. Howard's translation is of the original edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1928). Breton revised this edition and added a preface in 1962 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). As far as I have been able to determine, no English translation of the

revised edition has yet appeared. I have used the 1962 edition in preparing this essay, and it is from this edition that I quote in those cases where passages in French appear in the main text. In none of these cases is there a significant difference between the 1928 and 1962 versions.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950). The comparison is a more natural one than it may seem at first glance. Leiris was himself already an author of Surrealist texts when he joined an expedition to Africa as a secretary. His highly personal and impressionistic journal can be classed as ethnography only in a peripheral sense.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Beaujour, "Qu'est-ce que 'Nadja'?" *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 15, No. 172 (April 1, 1967), 797. The translation is my own. Original text: "le récit d'une expédition ethnologique vers l'intérieur d'une ville singulièrement inquiétante, un Paris hanté."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 798. Original text: "le merveilleux est à portée de la main dans les sites les plus vulgaires."

<sup>5</sup> Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969); *A Separate Reality* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); *Journey to Ixtlan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972). Reference to these works will be by parenthetical pagination. The entire three-book series will be referred to in the text simply as *Don Juan*. (A fourth and "final" installment has recently appeared, but has no particular effect on the present study.)

<sup>6</sup> The translation is my own. Original text: "le ton adopté pour le récit se calque sur celui de l'observation médicale, ... qui tend à garder trace de tout ce qu'examen et interrogatoire peuvent livrer, sans s'embarasser en le rapportant du moindre apprêt quant au style" (p. 6).

<sup>7</sup> Beaujour, 785. Original text: "il reste à savoir si la surprise et la coïncidence appartiennent à l'ordre des faits, dont Breton prétend ne jamais s'éloigner, ou à la nature du récit qui les rapporte et les entraîne vers la fiction."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 788. Original text: "se tient rarement... [au] compte rendu scientifique."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Original text: "l'usage ordinaire de ces adverbes confondants et labiles: *toujours*, *jamais* et *précisément*," "les rafales de questions rhétoriques qui débouchent sur des territoires où la science évite de s'aventurer."

<sup>10</sup> The photograph appears in the 1962 edition only, and so is not included in the Howard translation. The original text reads "yeux de fougère" (p. 128), or "fern-eyes." The photograph suggests that it may be the shape of the eyes, rather than the color, which resembles a fern—though with Breton, of course, all metaphors are suspect.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Martin, "'Nadja' et le mieux-dire," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 72, No. 2 (March-April, 1972), 274-86.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285. The translation is my own. Original text: "nous avons affaire à un écrivain attaché à son art, à un artisan sérieux du 'travail bien fait' et, en fin de compte, respectueux de certaines lois de l'expression littéraire."

<sup>13</sup> The translation is my own. Original text: "Subjectivité et objectivité se livrent, au cours d'une vie humaine, une série d'assauts, desquels le plus souvent assez vite la première sort très mal en point" (p. 6).

<sup>14</sup> Roger Shattuck, "The Nadja File," *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale pour l'Etude de Dada et du Surréalisme*, No. 1 (October, 1965), 44-56.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Balakian, *André Breton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 110-11.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Cardinal, "Nadja and Breton," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 41, No. 3 (Spring, 1972), 195.

<sup>18</sup> Shattuck, 56.

<sup>19</sup> "And if a character is not a temptation, what is he?" — Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Cardinal, p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> Balakian, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. p. 169 of the 1962 version, more accurately rendered as "...cry of 'Who goes there?' Who goes there? Is it you, Nadja?..." etc. The final series of questions, in other words, when correctly punctuated and complete, comes directly from the narrator.

<sup>23</sup> Balakian, pp. 114-15.